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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8390
INFO RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 1000
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 7989
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 6161
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 4482
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 2161
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 4445
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 3546
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 8595
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 6040
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0707
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 2859
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 000659

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: FONSEKA MOVES GOALPOSTS ON VICTORY AGAIN

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr., for reasons 1.4(b,d).

11. (U) In a June 30 interview widely reported in the Sri Lankan press, Army Chief Sarath Fonseka estimated LTTE strength at 5,000 cadres and stated "maybe a maximum of a year from now the LTTE should lose large areas." He also said "Even if we finish the war, capture the whole of the north, still the LTTE might have some members joining them...The LTTE might survive another two decades with over 1,000 cadres...it might continue as an insurgency forever."

12. (U) Fonseka has made a habit of predicting that victory is just around the corner. In a Sunday Observer interview in December 2007 he stated the LTTE had 3,000 cadres and would be "wiped out" within six months. This estimate of the Tigers' strength followed a May 2007 assertion that 4,000 Tigers remained and that if they lost 2,000 cadres they would be finished. By the December interview the military figures had put LTTE fighters killed at over 2500 yet the overall fighting strength had only been reduced by 1000.

13. (C) COMMENT: Fonseka's term as Army Commander will end December 6th and he is widely believed to be angling to continue on with a new appointment. The President's political popularity is partly dependent on Fonseka and the Army delivering progress against the LTTE. Fonseka's shifting of the goal posts on when victory can be expected may be a conscious attempt to manage public expectations, to give himself cover for not winning the war sooner, secure re-appointment and allow the President to maintain his strong political position. The shifting figures on LTTE personnel illustrate the difficulty in measuring success in a war of attrition, in which the LTTE seek to conceal their actual losses by recovering the bodies of their dead and wounded and by transmitting misleading casualty figures that they know the GSL monitors. Even as the military seeks to control more territory the overall political strategy has not likely significantly affected the LTTE's ability to recruit, train and deploy new fighters to replace those killed in the fighting. Fonseka's comment about the possibility that the insurgency could continue "forever" is different in tone than previous statements. It mirrors Post's comments to the government that there can be no purely military solution to the conflict. Nothing in the GSL's approach to the conflict at this point however, reflects the sort of

counter-insurgency thinking that views the local population as the center of gravity and employs a predominantly political strategy that seeks to address core grievances of the populations, with military forces in a supporting role. The interview could be the first hint of the GSL attempting to prepare the public for an outcome well short of total victory over the LTTE. End Comment
BLAKE